

# **Supporting the Literacy Development of Preschool Children**

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“It is common for adults to want to help, change, and teach children without delay. We often think that talking about a child's ideas is a waste of time - after all, there is so much he or she needs to learn! But once you get into the habit of having easy social conversations with preschoolers, you will see them staying with you longer, paying more attention, and doing things more like adults. Children who can stay in conversations will, in time, learn more and have the opportunities to use what they to learn still more and build stronger relationships with people.”

- James B. MacDonald

# **Preschool Language Development**

## **Why is Language So Important?**

- Language makes it possible for a child to objectify and conceptualize their world and themselves
- Personal function of language is to represent reality, be a symbolic carrier of world images:
- Language reflects the reality of individuals and their cultures
- Language is the codification of centuries of human experience
- Language must be recreated in each individual

## **How Children Acquire Language**

- For humans, language learning is innate.
- Environment and interactions have significant impact on children's language development.
- Children learn by “creating” language.
- Children learn language through play.

## **Strategies for Talking With Children**

- Talk with children in ways that allow them to articulate their actions and ideas.
- Give children the opportunity to explain what they are doing helps children to clarify their ideas and reinforces what they are learning.
- Comment on children's actions—you climbed to the very top of the climber out side today.

## **Preschool conversations: beginning language development**

### **Closed-ended Questions**

- Usually the adult already knows the answer she is looking for.
- Closed ended questions have one right answer.
- Closed ended questions can often be answered with yes or no or a few words.

Practice: In pairs decide who will be the tutor, who the preschooler. Then pick a topic. It is the job of the tutor to ask the preschooler as many close-ended questions on the topic as they can think up, waiting for the reply.

### **Open-ended Questions**

- Have many possible answers.
- Require children to think about what they are doing.
- Give children the opportunity to expand their language.
- Prompt children to think about differences and similarities.
- Encourage children to consider consequences.
- Help children learn to assess feelings.

Practice: Now trade roles and stick to the same topic or pick another one if you like. The tutor's job is to ask the preschooler as many open-ended questions as they can think up, waiting for the reply.

# Stages of Language Development

## Birth – 1 year

- Children play with sounds, babble, and combine sounds
- By 6 months, vocalization includes intonation; children respond to own name, angry and friendly tones
- By about 8 months, they comprehend much more language than they can produce and begin to say words (mommy daddy, bye-bye, no)

## 1 – 2 years

- Children use one or more words with meaning
- Utter sounds with adult intonation as if speaking in sentences
- Begin to combine words such as toy fall
- By about 18 months, children have a repertoire of words (some say 5 – 20, others 20 – 50)
- Use mostly nouns

## 2 – 3 years

- Dramatic growth in language
- Children name objects common to own surroundings
- By 2, children use I, me, you (pronouns) but not always correctly; by 3 they have these pronouns
- Typically vocabulary grows (some say 150 – 300 words, others from 300 words to 1000 words)
- Speak with 2 – 3 word sentences
- Lots of play with words, repeating words, making up nonsense words

## 3 – 4 years

- Increasing accuracy of sentence structure and vocabulary
- Adding syntax such as plurals, regular verbs, and past tense (but often with errors such as broked or fishes)

## 5 – 6 years

- Language sounds more and more like adults
- Vocabulary increasing (typically to about 2500 words)
- Sometimes difficulty pronouncing certain sounds

## **Tips on Fostering Language Development**

- Create an atmosphere in which children hear and use lots of language
- Connect language with pleasure and enjoyment (avoid creating stress around speaking)
- Provide opportunities for children to discriminate and classify sounds (poems, chants, songs, rhymes)
- Expose children to lots of new and rich vocabulary
- Use thematic units to introduce new vocabulary
- Use books to introduce new vocabulary
- Expose children to wordless books that allow children to invent their own stories from the pictures
- Use riddles and jokes with children
- Read poems with children
- Encourage children to listen to others and demonstrate understanding
- Welcome children's use of their native language
- Provide children with opportunities to experience many different functions of language; encourage them to reflect on their feelings, express points of view, summarize events, solve problems, predict outcomes, and generate hypotheses
- Connect language to math; invite children to describe size and amounts, make comparisons, define sets, and explain thinking
- Include many small group, one on one, and child directed learning situations throughout the day
- Promote language in social situations with adults and other children
- Provide reinforcement for language use
- Link language learning to learning centers
- Use pictures in the classroom and have children describe what they see
- Include materials in centers that spark new vocabulary and thinking
- Encourage children to retell stories (of books they've heard as well as stories from their personal experiences)
- Write and talk about class trips
- Use the morning message to encourage vocabulary
- Create class stories
- Summarize the day

## **Preparation for Reading Aloud**

### **1. Book Selection:**

- Is it a good story; is it worth sharing with my tutee?
- Think about needs and interests of the tutee
- Use high-quality children's literature

### **2. Preview and Practice:**

- Model fluent reading
- Plan questions and anticipate reactions
- Select vocabulary to discuss

### **3. Animation and Expression:**

- Change voices to denote different character's emotions and various moods the author was suggesting
- Use hand gestures, facial expressions, and props such as wearing a similar hat as a character in the story

### **4. Set the Stage:**

- Is the child physically comfortable?
- Make sure the child/children can see the book

## Handout #1

### REFLECTION GUIDE: STRATEGIES FOR BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER READING ALOUD

After Reading...	
During Reading...	
Before Reading...	

## COMPREHENSION GUIDE FOR READ-ALOUD CONVERSATIONS

<b>Thinking strategy</b> Mental process that good readers use	<b>Description</b> What the mental process entails	<b>Questions</b> Questions that promote this thinking strategy
<b>Activate prior knowledge</b>	Recall previous experience and knowledge, making connections with text content, meaning, and style	What has happened in your life that is like this story? What have you read about or seen that relates to this topic?
<b>Analyze formats</b>	Predict characteristics and content of a book based on a review of formats — organization, graphics, and presentation of the text	Based on the title, cover, table of contents, headings, charts, tables, and pictures, what do you think this book is about? Can you predict what will be in each section?
<b>Visualize</b>	Identify and describe mental pictures and images that occur to the reader as text is read	What pictures or images pop into your head about a desert? Can you imagine what the scene/person/item looks like?
<b>Form predictions</b>	Apply growing knowledge of author and content to predict story developments or upcoming content	What clues are in the story about what will happen next? Based on the information we've read, what else will the author(s) discuss?
<b>Make inferences</b>	Combine analysis of the text with what you know of the world to form educated guesses about meaning	What is the characters' relationship, based on how they're acting? How will information in this graph influence public choices?
<b>Generate questions</b>	Wonder about text — what's the purpose, why this detail, what's missing, and what remains to be learned?	What questions do you have about what's coming up in the story? Does the chart on this page make you wonder about anything else?
<b>Monitor understanding</b>	Identify points of confusion about the text and analyze why they occur	Where did you lose track of what's happening in the story? Are there terms/ideas you don't understand on this page?
<b>Fix confusion</b>	Apply fix-up strategies for areas of confusion so that reading can continue	Can you reread that paragraph and look for clues about what's confusing you? What words do you need to know more about to be able to move on?
<b>Synthesize content</b>	Identify main ideas, summarize content, identify contrasts, and make comparisons	Can you summarize the main points of this article in a few sentences? How are the main characters in each story the same? How are they different?



## **Learning Experiences for Preschoolers**

### **Making things**

- Art area
- Block area (hollow blocks)
- Sand/water area
- Math/manipulative area

### **Telling and recording stories**

- Flannel/magnetic area (storyboards)
- Writing/drawing area
- Listening area (stories, rhymes, music lyrics)

### **Dramatic play**

- Builds oral language skills and vocabulary
- Allows children to freely express their thoughts and ideas
- Develops the imagination
- Explores social relationships and cultural roles
- Connects language with movement and action
- When children interact with each other, they have more prolonged conversations than when they interact with adults

### **Thematic Units of Study: Insects**

Some hands-on activities in this example:

- Looking at pictures of insects, talking and posing questions
- Scouting insects outside – real ones
- Talking about insect experiences
- Drawing insects
- Match initial letter sounds to insect picture cards
- Study an insect a day
- Feature stories, poems and songs about insect of the day
- Have an “insect parade” with costumes